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On the Work of the Holy Spirit.

THE

CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS

OF THE SEVERAL

BAPTIST CHURCHES

OF THE

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ASSOCIATION,

Assembled at Nottingham, May 23, 24, 2

1809:

BRETHREN'S MARK COLLEGE ANGUS LIBRARY

Maintaining the important doctrines of three equal persons in the Godhead; eternal and personal election; original sin; particular redemption; free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; efficacious grace in regeneration; the final perseverance of real believers; the resurrection of the dead; the future judgment; the eternal happiness of the righteous, and everlasting misery of such as die impenitent; with the congregational order of the churches, inviolably:

To the several Churches they represent;

Meeting at *Loscoe*, and *Swanwick*, Derbyshire; *Sutton-Ashfield*, and *Nottingham*, Nottinghamshire; *Burton-upon-Trent*, Staffordshire; *Sheepshead*, *Leicester*, *Sutton-in-the-Elms*, *Arnsby*, and *Foxton*, Leicestershire; *Oakham*, Rutland; *Spalding*, Lincolnshire; *Gretton*, *Clipstone*, *Guilsborough*, *Braunston*, *Walgrave*, *Kettering*, *Moulton*, *Road*, *Bugbrook*, *Braybrook*, and *Northampton*, Northamptonshire; *Olney*, *Fenny-Stratford*, and *Ivinghoe*, Buckinghamshire; *Dunstable*, and *Luton*, Bedfordshire; and *St Albans*, Hertfordshire.

Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ our Lord!

DEAR BRETHREN,

BEING assembled at the time and place appointed, we enjoyed a pleasant and profitable interview with our brethren. In reading the letter from St. Albans, we noticed the death of our worthy brother and father, Mr. JOHN GILL; who had been a member of this association almost from its commencement, and who, after an honourable life, finished his course in peace. In some of the letters we perceived the state of the churches not as we would; but on the other hand, several in the course of the past year have been comfortably provided with pastors, and the far greater part are peaceable and prosperous.

The subject to which we would invite your attention on the present occasion, is *the Influence of the Spirit;* which it is not our design to discuss in a doctrinal manner, (taking it for granted you are already established in the belief of a divine agency on the soul, and have a competent acquaintance with its nature and effects,) but rather with a view to assist you in making a suitable improvement of what you already acknowledge and believe. Assuming it on the ground of revelation for an undoubted fact, that there is an operation of the Holy Ghost, to which the regeneration and growth in holiness of every christian is to be primarily imputed, and that without it nothing can be done or attained to any important purpose in religion; we request your candid attention to a few hints respecting the most likely method of securing and perpetuating that blessed influence. To this we are the more encouraged, by remarking the numerous cautions, warnings and advices, with which the mention of this subject is joined in the sacred writings; sufficient to shew that the doctrine of which it treats is a practical doctrine, not designed to supersede the use of means, or the exercise of our rational powers; but rather to stimulate us to exertion, and teach us how to exert them aright. "If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit. Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, by which ye are sealed to the day of redemption."

The Spirit, we must remember, is a most free agent, and though he will not utterly forsake the work of his hands, he may be expected to withdraw himself in a great measure, on being slighted, neglected, or opposed; and as our holiness and comfort depend entirely upon him, it is important for us to know, what deportment is calculated to invite, and what to repel his presence.

1. If we would wish for much of the presence of God by his Spirit, we must learn to set a high value upon it. The first communication of spiritual influence, is, indeed, imparted without this requisite; for it can only be possessed in any adequate degree by those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. "I am found of them that sought me not." But in subsequent donations, the Lord seems very much to regulate his conduct by a rule, that of bestowing his richest favours where he knows they are most coveted, and will be most prized. The principle whence divine communications flow, is free unmerited benignity; but in the mode of dispensing its fruits, it is worthy of the supreme Ruler to consult his majesty, by

withholding a copious supply, till he has excited in the heart a profound estimation of his gifts.

No words are adequate to express the excellence and dignity of the gift of the divine Spirit. While Solomon was dedicating the temple, his great soul appears to have been put into a rapture at the very idea, that he whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, should deign to dwell with man upon the earth. How much more should each of us be transported when he finds the idea realised, by his own heart having become the seat of the divine presence. There are two considerations drawn from scripture, which assist us in forming a conception of the magnitude of this blessing.

The first is, that it is the great promise of the christian dispensation, and stands in nearly the same relation to us, that the coming of the Messiah did to pious Jews. They waited for the consolation of Israel in the birth of Christ; and now that event is past, we are waiting, in a similar manner, for the promise of the Spirit, of which the church has hitherto enjoyed but the first fruits. To this, the Saviour, after his resurrection, pointed the expectation of his apostles, as emphatically the promise of the Father, which they were to receive at the distance of a few days; and when it was accomplished at the day of Pentecost, we find Peter insisting on it as the most illustrious proof of his ascension, as well as the chief fruit that converts were to reap from their repentance and baptism. "Repent and be baptised," said he, "every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost: for the promise, (that is, the promise of the Spirit,) is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord your God shall call." The apostle Paul places it in a similar light when he tells us, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles:" and in what that blessing consists, he informs us, by adding, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." On this account, probably, he is styled the *Spirit of promise*, *that Spirit of promise*, *the Spirit so often promised*; in the communication of whom, the promises of God so centre, that it may be considered as the sum and substance of all the promises.

Another consideration, which evinces the supreme importance of this gift, is that, in the esteem of our Lord,

it was more than a compensation to his disciples, for the loss of his bodily presence; so much superior to it, that he tells them, it was expedient he should leave them in order to make way for it: "If I go not away, the Spirit will not come; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Great as the advantages were they derived from his society, they yet remained in a state of minority; their views were contracted, their hearts full of earthly adhesions, and a degree of carnality and prejudice attended them, which it was the office of the Spirit only to remove. From his more ample and effectual teaching, a great increase of knowledge was to accrue, to qualify them for their work of bearing witness to Christ, and a powerful energy to go forth, which was to render their ministry, though in themselves so much inferior, far more successful than the personal ministry of our Lord. In consequence of his agency, the apostles were to become enlightened and intrepid, and the world convinced. "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when the Spirit of truth is come, he will lead you into all truth. He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." Accordingly, after his descent, we find the apostles strangely transformed: an unction, a fervour, a boldness marked their character, to which they had hitherto been strangers; and such conviction attended their preaching, that in a short time a great part of the world sunk under the weapons of their holy warfare. Nor is there any pretence for alleging, that this communication was confined to miraculous gifts, since it is asserted to be that Spirit which should abide in them for ever, and by which the church should be distinguished from the world. He is styled, "the Spirit of truth whom the world could not receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him:" but it is added, "ye know him, for he dwelleth in you, and shall be in you."

As we are indebted to the Spirit for the first formation of the divine life, so it is he who alone can maintain it, and render it strong and vigorous. It is his office to actuate the habits of grace where they are already planted; to hold our souls in life, and to "strengthen us that we may walk up and down in the name of the Lord." It is his office to present the mysteries of salvation; the truths which relate to the mediation of Christ and the riches of his grace, in so penetrating and transforming a manner, as to render them vital, operating principles, the food and the solace of our spirits. Without his agency, however

intrinsically excellent, they will to us be mere dead speculation, an inert mass: it is only when they are animated by his breath, that they become spirit and life.

It is his office to afford that anointing, by which we may know all things: not only by a light which is merely directive to the understanding, but which so shines upon the heart, as to give a relish of the sweetness of divine truth, and effectually produce a compliance with its dictates. It belongs to him "to seal us to the day of redemption;" to put that work and character upon us, which distinguishes the children of God, as well as to afford a foretaste as an earnest of the future inheritance. "And hereby," saith an apostle, "we know that we are of God by the Spirit which he hath given us." It is his office to subdue the corruption of our nature, not by leaving us inactive spectators of the combat, but by engaging us to a determined resistance to every sinful propensity, by teaching our hands to war, and our fingers to fight, so that the victory shall be ours, and the praise his. "To help the infirmities of saints, who know not what to pray for as they ought, by making intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered," is an important branch of his office. He kindles their desires, gives them a glimpse of the fulness of God, that all comprehending good; and by exciting a relish of the beauties of holiness, and the ineffable pleasure which springs from nearness to God, disposes them to the fervent and effectual prayer, which availeth much. In short, as Christ is the way, so it is equally certain, that the Spirit is the fountain of all the light and strength, which enable us to walk in that way. Lest it should be suspected that in ascribing so much to the agency of the Spirit, we diminish the obligations we owe to the Redeemer, it may not be improper to remark, that the tendency of what we have advanced, rightly understood, will be just the contrary, since the scriptures constantly remind us, that the gift of the Holy Ghost is the fruit of his mediation, and the purchase of his death. It was his interposing as "Emmanuel, God with us," to repair the breach betwixt man and God, that prevailed upon the Father to communicate the Spirit to such as believe on him, and to entrust the whole agency of it to his hands. As the reward of his sufferings, he ascended on high, and received gifts for men; of which, the right of bestowing the Spirit is the principal, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

The bestowment, in every instance, through the successive periods of the church, looks back to the death of the Redeemer, as the root and principle whence it takes its rise, and consequently is calculated to enlarge our conceptions of his office and character, as the copiousness of the streams evinces the exuberance of the fountain. To him the Spirit was first given above measure; in him it resides as in an inexhaustible spring, to be imparted in the dispensation of his gospel to every member of his mystical body, in pursuance of the purpose of his grace, and the ends of his death. It is *his* Spirit, called, "the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus," not only by reason of the essential union which subsists between the persons of the Godhead, but because the right of bestowing it was ascertained to him in the covenant of redemption.

2. If we would wish to enjoy much of the light and influence of the Spirit, we must seek it by fervent prayer. There are peculiar encouragements held out in the word of God to this purpose. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." To illustrate the readiness of our heavenly Father to bestow this blessing, our Lord borrows a comparison from the instinct of parental affection, which prompts a parent to give with alacrity good things to his children. He will not merely supply his wants, which benevolence might prompt him to do with respect to a stranger, but he will do it with feelings peculiar to the parental relation, and will experience as much pleasure in conferring, as the child in receiving his favours. It is thus with our heavenly Father: he delights in exercising kindness to his children, and especially in promoting their spiritual welfare. He gives not merely with the liberality of a prince, but with the heart of a father. It is worth remarking, that in relating the preceding discourse, while one evangelist makes express mention of the Spirit, another speaks only of good things, intimating that the communications of the Spirit comprehends whatever is good. Other things may, or may not be ultimately beneficial: they are either of a doubtful nature in themselves, or are rendered so by the propensity our corruption gives us to abuse them. But the influence of the Spirit, by its efficacy in subduing that corruption, must be invariably beneficial; it is such an immediate emanation from God, the fountain of blessedness, that it can never fail of being intrinsically, essentially, and eternally good. It is also de-

serving our attention, that the injunction of seeking it by prayer, is prefaced by a parable constructed on purpose to teach us the propriety of urging our suit with importunity. In imploring other gifts, (which we are at liberty to do with submission,) it is still a great point of duty to moderate our desires, and to be prepared for a disappointment, because, as we have already remarked, it is possible the things we are seeking, may neither conduce to the glory of God, nor to our ultimate benefit; for who knoweth what is good for a man all the days of this his vain life! But when we present our requests for a larger measure of his grace, we labour under no such uncertainty, we may safely let forth all the ardor and vehemence of our spirits, since our desires are fixed upon what is the very knot and juncture, where the honour of God and the interests of his creatures are indissolubly united. Desires after grace, are, in fact, desires after God; and how is it possible they can be too vehement or intense, when directed to such an object? His gracious presence is not like the limited goods of this life, fitted to a particular crisis, or adapted to a special exigency in a fluctuating scene of things; it is alike suited to all times and seasons, the food of souls, the proper good of man, under every aspect of providence, and even exchange of worlds. "My soul," said David, "panteth after God, yea, for the living God. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me." The most eminent effusions of the Spirit we read of in scripture, were not only afforded to prayer, but appear to have taken place at the very time that exercise was performed. The descent of the Holy Ghost, at the day of Pentecost, was while the disciples were with one accord in one place; and after the imprisonment of Peter and John, who being dimissed went to their own company, "While they prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken with a mighty wind, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." When a new heart and a new spirit are promised in Ezekiel, it is added, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it forthem."

3. Habitual dependence on divine influence is an important duty. This may be considered as opposed to two things, first, to depending on ourselves to the neglect of divine agency; next, to despondency and distrust. When the Holy Spirit has condescended to take the conduct of souls, it is unquestionably great presumption to enter upon duty in the same manner as if no such

assistance were needed, or to be expected; and the result will be as with Sampson, who said, "I will go forth and shake myself, as in time past, while he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." It is one thing to acknowledge a dependence on heavenly influence in speculation, and another thing so to realize and to feel it as to say from the heart, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." A mere assent to this proposition, that the Spirit must concur in the production of every great work, (an assent not easily withheld without rejecting the scriptures,) falls very short of the practical homage due from feeble worms to so great an Agent; and a most solemn and explicit acknowledgment of entire dependence, may reasonably be expected. When you engage in prayer, or in any other duty, endeavour to enter upon it with a serious and deliberate recollection of your need of the Spirit. Let the consciousness of your weakness and insufficiency for every good work, be a sentiment rendered familiar to your minds, and deeply impressed on your hearts.

But while we recommend this, there is another extreme against which we think it our duty to guard you, and that is, a disposition to despondency and distrust. We are most ready to acknowledge that the assistance you need is most free and gratuitous, neither given to our deservings, nor flowing from any natural connection subsisting betwixt our endeavours and the exertion of divine agency. The Spirit of God is a free Spirit; and it is impossible to conceive how either faith or prayer should have an intrinsic efficacy in drawing down influence from heaven. There is, however, a connection established by divine vouchsafement, which entitle believers to expect, in the use of means, such measures of gracious assistance as are requisite to sustain and support them in their religious course. The Spirit is spoken of as the matter of promise to which every christian is encouraged to look: "the promise is to you and to your children, and to as many as the Lord your God shall call." Agreeable to this, it is represented as the express purpose of Christ's becoming a curse for us, that the "promise of the Spirit might come on the Gentiles through faith." The same expectation is justified by the Saviour's own declaration, when on the last and great day of the feast he stood and cried, 'whoever is athirst, let him come unto me and drink, for he that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water;' this, says the

evangelist, 'he spoke of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.'

The readiness of the Holy Ghost to communicate himself to true believers, is also evinced by the tenor of evangelical precepts: "be ye strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." To commend a person to be strong, seems strange and unusual language, but is sufficiently explained when we reflect, that a portion of spiritual power is ready to be communicated to those who duly seek it: "be ye filled with the Spirit," which is the exhortation of the same apostle, takes it for granted that a copious supply is at hand, sufficient to satiate the desires of the saints. We are at a loss to account for such precepts, without supposing an established connection betwixt the condition of believers, and the further communication of divine influence. To the same purpose, Paul speaks with apostolic authority, "this I say, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh;" and Jude inculcates the duty of praying in the Spirit, which would be strange if no assistance were to be obtained; and as prayer is a duty of daily occurrence, the injunction implies that it is ready to be imparted to christians, not by fits and starts, or at distant intervals, but in a stated regular course.

For this reason, when we hear christians complaining of the habitual withdrawment of the divine presence, we are under the necessity of ascribing it to their own fault: not that we mean to deny there is much of sovereignty in this affair, or that "the Spirit like the wind bloweth where it listeth." But it should be remembered, we are now adverting to the situation of real believers, who are entitled to the promise, and though it is probable there is much of sovereignty exercised even with respect to *them*, we apprehend it rather concerns those influences, which are consolatory than such as are sanctifying; though there is a degree of satisfaction intermingled with every exercise of genuine piety, yet it is manifest, some influences of the Spirit tend more immediately to comfort, others to purification. Some are engaged in the fixed contemplation of objects which exist out of ourselves, the perfections of God, the excellency of Christ, the admirable constitution of the gospel, accompanied with a delightful connection of a personal interest in whatever comes under our view; the natural fruit of which is *joy unspeakable and full of glory*. By others, we are more immediately impressed with a lasting sense of our ex-

treme unworthiness, and made to mourn over remaining corruption, and the criminal defects inherent in our best services.

In the midst of such exercises, it is possible hope may languish and comfort be reduced to a low ebb, yet the divine life may be still advancing, and the soul growing in humility, deadness to the world, and the mortification of her own will, as the sap during winter retires to the root of the plant, ready to ascend and produce verdure and beauty on the return of spring. This is the will of God, even our sanctification; and though he delights in comforting his people at proper seasons, he is much less intent on this, than in promoting their spritual improvement, to which in this their probationary state every thing is made subservient. Let us not then confound the decay of consolation with the decay of piety, nor imagine we can want the aids necessary to prevent the latter, unless we have forfeited them by presumption, negligence, and sloth. Whenever christians sensibly decline in religion, they ought to charge themselves with the guilt of having grieved the Spirit; they should take the alarm, *repent and do their first works;* they are suffering under the rebukes of that paternal justice, which God exercises in his own family. Such a measure of gracious assistance in the use of means, being by the tenor of the new covenant *ascertained* to real christians, as is requisite for their comfortable walk with God, to find it withheld, should engage them in deep searchings of heart; and make them fear lest *a promise being left them of entering into rest, they should appear to come short of it.* But this leads us to observe, in the last place, that,

4. If we wish to enjoy the light of the Spirit, we must take care to maintain a deportment suited to the character of that divine agent. When the apostle exhorts us not to grieve the Spirit of God, by which we are sealed to the day of redemption, it is forcibly implied that he is susceptible of offence, and that to offend him involves heinous ingratitude and folly: ingratitude, for what a requital is this for being sealed to the day of redemption; and folly, inasmuch as we may fitly say on this, as Paul did on a different occasion, "who is he that maketh us glad, but the same that is made sorry by us;" have we any other comforter when he is withdrawn? Is there a single ray of light can visit us in his absence, or can we be safe for a moment without his guidance and support? If the im-

mense and infinite Spirit, by a mysterious condescension, deigns to take the conduct of a worm, ought it not to yield the most implicit submission? The appropriate duty owing to a faithful and experienced guide is a ready compliance with his dictates; and how much more may this be expected, when the disparity betwixt the parties in question is no less than infinite. The language of the Holy Ghost, in describing the manners of the ancient Israelites, is awfully monitory to professors in every age; "they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, therefore he turned to be their enemy and fought against them." As we wish to avoid whatever is more curious than useful, we shall not stay to enquire precisely on what occasions, or to what extent the Spirit is capable of being resisted: it may be sufficient to observe, it is evident from melancholy experience, that it is very possible to neglect what is the obvious tendency of his motions, which is invariably to produce universal holiness. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, faith:* whatever is contrary to these, involves an opposition to the Spirit, and is directly calculated to quench his sacred influence. From his descending on Christ in the form of a dove, as well as from many express declarations of scripture, we may with certainty conclude the indulgence of all the irascible and maligant passions to be peculiarly repugnant to his nature; and it is remarkable, that the injunction of not grieving the Holy Spirit, is immediately followed by a particular caution against cherishing such dispositions; "let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Have you not found by experience, that the indulgence of the former has destroyed that self-recollection and composure, which are so essential to devotion. Vindictive passions surround the soul with a sort of turbulent atmosphere, than which nothing can be conceived more opposite to that calm and holy light in which the blessed Spirit loves to dwell. The indulgence of sensual lusts, or of whatever enslave the soul to the appetites of the body, in violation of the rules of sobriety and chasity, it seems almost unnecessary to add, must have a direct tendency to quench his sacred influences; wherever such desires prevail, they war against the soul, immerse it in carnality, and utterly indispose

it to every thing spiritual and heavenly. *That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit*, it bears a resemblance to its author in being a spiritual production, which requires to be nourished by divine meditation, by pure and holy thoughts.

If you wish to live in the fellowship of the Spirit, you must guard with no less care against the encroachments of worldly-mindedness, recollecting we are christians just as far as our treasures and our hearts are placed in heaven, and no farther. A heart overcharged with the cares of this world, is as disqualified for converse with God, and for walking in the Spirit, as by surfeiting and drunkenness; to which, by their tendency to intoxicate and stupify, they bear a great resemblance.

How many, by an immoderate attachment to wealth, and by being determined at all events to become rich, *have fallen into divers foolish and hurtful lusts, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*; and where the result has not been so signally disastrous, a visible langour in religion has ensued, the friendship of serious christians been shunned, and the public ordinances of religion attended with little fruit or advantage. As it is the design of the Spirit in his sacred visitations to form us for an habitual converse with spiritual and eternal objects, nothing can tend more directly to contract it, than to bury our souls in earth; it is as impossible for the eye of the mind, as for that of the body to look opposite ways at once; nor can we aim at *the things which are seen and temporal*, but by losing sight of those *which are unseen, and are eternal*.

But though a general attention to the duties of piety and virtue, and careful avoidance of the sins opposed to these, is certainly included in a becoming deportment to the Holy Spirit, perhaps it is not *all* that is included. The children of God are characterised in scripture by their being *led by the Spirit: led*, evidently not impelled, not driven forward in a headlong course, without choice or design; but being by the constitution of their nature, rational and intelligent, and by the influence of grace, rendered spiritual, they are disposed to obey at a touch, and to comply with the gentler insinuations of divine grace; they are ready to take that precise impression which corresponds with the mind and purpose of the Spirit. You are aware of what consequence it is in worldly concerns to embrace opportunities, and to improve critical seasons; and thus, in the things of the Spirit, there are times

peculiarly favourable, moments of happy visitation, where much more may be done towards the advancement of our spiritual interest than usual. These are gales of the Spirit, unexpected influence of light and of power, which no assidulty in the means of grace can command, but which it is a great point of wisdom to improve. If the husbandman is attentive to the vicissitudes of weather, and the face of the sky, that he may be prepared to take the full benefit of every gleam of sunshine, and every falling shower, how much more alert and attentive should we be, in watching for those influences from above, which are necessary to ripen and mature a far more precious crop? As the natural consequence of being long under the guidance of another, is a quick perception of his meaning, so that we can meet his wishes before they are verbally expressed; something of this ready discernment, accompanied with instant compliance, may reasonably be expected from those who profess to be habitually led by the Spirit.

The design of his operation is in one view invariably the same, the production of holiness; but the branches of which that consists, and the exercises of mind which are rendered subservient to it are various, and he who is intent on walking in the Spirit, will be car ful to fall in with that train of thought, and cherish that cast of reflection to which he is especially invited. For want of more docility in this respect it is probable we have often sustained loss. Permit us here to suggest two or three heads of enquiry. You have sometimes felt a peculiar seriousness of mind, the delusive glare of worldly objects has faded away, or become dim before your eyes, and death and eternity appearing at the door, have filled the whole field of vision. Have you improved such seasons for fixing those maxims and establishing those practical conclusions, which may produce an habitual sobriety of mind, when things appear under a different aspect? You have sometimes found, instead of a reluctance to pray, a powerful persuasion to that exercise, so that you felt as if you would do nothing else. Have you always complied with these motions, and suffered nothing but the claims of absolute necessity to divert you from pouring out your hearts at a throne of grace? The Spirit is said to make intercession for saints, with groanings which cannot be uttered; when you have felt those ineffable longings after God, have you indulged them to the utmost? have you stretched every sail, launched

forth into the deep of the divine perfections and promises, and possessed yourselves as much as possible of the fulness of God? There are moments when the conscience of a good man is more tender, has a nicer and more discriminating touch than usual; the evil of sin in general, and of his own in particular, appears in a more pure and piercing light. Have you availed yourselves of such seasons as these for searching into the chambers of imagery, and while you detected greater and greater abominations, been at pains to bring them out, and slay them before the Lord? Have such visitations effected something towards the mortification of sin? or have they been suffered to expire in mere ineffectual resolutions? The fruits which godly sorrow produced in the Corinthians, were thus beautifully pourtrayed: *what carefulness it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what vehement desire, yea what revenge.* There are moments in the experience of a good man, when he feels a more than ordinary softness of mind; the frost of selfishness dissolves, and his heart flows forth in love to God and his fellow creatures. How careful should we be to cherish such a frame, and to embrace the opportunity of subduing resentments, and of healing those sore wounds which it is scarcely possible to avoid in passing through this unquiet world.

There is a holy skill in turning the several parts of christian experience to account, analogous to what the votaries of the world display in the improvement of every conjunction, from which it is possible to derive any emolument; and though the end they propose is mean and contemptible, the steadiness with which they pursue it, and their dexterity in the choice of means, deserve imitation. In these respects *they are wiser in their generation than the children of light.*

Do not allow yourselves to indulge in religious sloth, or to give way to the solicitations of the tempter from a confidence in the safety of your state, or in your spiritual immunities as christians. The habitual prevalence of such a disposition, will afford a much stronger proof of insincerity, than any arguments which can be adduced for the contrary; and admitting your pretensions to piety to be ever so valid, a little reflection may convince you, that a careless and negligent course will lay you open to the severest rebukes. "You only have I known, (says the Lord by the prophet) among all the families of the earth, therefore will I visit you for all your iniquities."

Remember, dear brethren, we profess a peculiar relation to God as his children, his witnesses, his people, his temple; the character of that glorious being, and of his religion will be contemplated by the world, chiefly through the medium of our spirit and conduct, which ought to display, as in a mirror, the virtues of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. It is strictly appropriate to the subject of our present meditations, to remind you that you are temples. "For ye," says the apostle, "are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." What purity, sanctity, and dignity may be expected in persons who bear such a character! A christian should look upon himself as something sacred and devoted, so that what involves but an ordinary degree of criminality in others, in him partakes of the nature of sacrilege; what is a breach of trust in others, is in him the profanation of a temple. Let us, dear brethren, watch and pray that nothing may be allowed a place in our hearts, that is not suitable to the residence of the holy and blessed God. Finally, *having such great and precious promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.*

Signed in behalf of the Association,

J. JARMAN, MODERATOR.

BREVIATES.

Tuesday evening vi. Brother *Jarman*, minister of the place, began with prayer; after which he was chosen Moderator. The letters from the churches were read; and brother *Nicholls* concluded with prayer.

Wednesday morning vi. Met for prayer. The brethen *Smith*, *Coles*, *Evans*, *Fletcher*, and *Burton*, were engaged.

——————— *half-past* x. Assembled for public worship, at the General Baptist Meeting. Brother *Cox* began with prayer. Brother *Blundell* preached from Psalm xxxvi. 8. *Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.* Brother *Heighton* prayed. Brother *Sutcliff* preached from Acts xi. 26. *The disciples were called christians first at Antioch.* Brother *Mills* concluded with prayer.

After dinner the ministers and messengers having retired, the Circular Letter, drawn up by brother *Hall*, was read and approved. The two following resolutions were passed:

1. That in recommending cases of meeting-houses to be collected for among the churches, we judge it adviseable, as ministers, not to sign any case, without being previously consulted us to the expediency of building, and satisfied as to the economy of the expenditure.

2. As the want of acceptable ministers has long been a matter of serious complaint in the churches, we have observed with pleasure, not only another seminary established at Bradford in Yorkshire, but a society formed by our brethren in London, for furnishing young ministers, whose piety and talents are approved by the churches, with at least two years instruction, previous to their engagement in the work: And as we learn that the funds of this society are already more than equal to their applications, we consider it as a call to the churches to look out from amongst them such young persons as appear to be devoted to Christ, and most suited to the work, and to draw forth their gifts by proper encouragement.

——— *evening* vi. Brother *Fuller* began with prayer. Brother *Hall* preached from Ephes. ii. 1. *You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins;* and concluded with prayer.

Thursday morning vi. Brother *Joseph Hall* prayed. Some of the ministers gave a brief account of their exercises during the past year. Settled the business of the Association Fund. The meeting was concluded with prayer by the moderator.

The subject for the next year's letter, *The promise of the Spirit, the grand encouragement in the promotion of the gospel.* Brother *Fuller* requested to write it.

The next Association to be held at Luton, on Tuesday and Wednesday in Whitsun week, 1810. Brethren *Nicholls* and *Fuller* to preach.

State of the Churches since the last Association.

Added	By profession of faith	101	*Diminished*	By death	42
	By letter	6		By dismiss.	8
	Restored	9		By exclus.	15
		116			65

Increase 51.

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